

Sermon Starter – Waiting for the Spirit to Breathe Life

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

In this fifth week of our Lenten journey, we may be feeling that the way is serious and heavy. If we allow them to, the Scripture stories this week offer levity and joy.

The story from Ezekiel fires our imagination. Imagine the power and joy of this enlivening Spirit that breathes life into a valley of hopeless, old, dead bones. There is something fun, surprising, and energizing about this image. God's Spirit is able to bring life out of the most hopeless terrain. The Spirit's work is joyful, astounding, wonderful! How often are we stuck in dust and deadness, unable to see what the Spirit wants to do? How might the Spirit be ready to bring our dead communities back to life?

The story of Lazarus' death is one of human drama with plenty of grief and tears. Even Jesus cries and is deeply moved at the death of Lazarus and the grieving of his friends. Still, this story ends in glory and joy. Lazarus is raised from the dead. His community is urged to take off the graveclothes, thereby freeing Lazarus into his new life. Hope abounds! Grief is turned to joy. The community is offered the opportunity to come to life and to be restored.

What kind of imagination and trust will it take for us to name the bleak valleys where we are dead, and wait with anticipation for the Spirit of God to breathe us into life? These stories celebrate God's redemptive action in the midst of our lifelessness. What is dead can spring forth into new life.

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